

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4821

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, AS, SN

SUBJECT: TWO INTERVIEWS WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE

REF: SINGAPORE 4768

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED STRAITS TIMES AND NEW NATION ON OCTOBER 17-19 PROVIDED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO RAMBLING INTERVIEWS LEE KUAN YEW GAVE GERALD STONE OF AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION AND MICHAEL RICHARDSON OF MELBOURNE AGE, ETC., PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR AUSTRALIA. PREVIOUS COVERAGE (IN OCTOBER 15 ST) WAS PIECE FROM MELBOURNE PIRATING PARTS OF RICHARDSON INTERVIEW WITH HEAVY EMPHASIS ON AUSTRALIA AS RECRUITMENT AREA FOR SUBVERSIVES; THIS HAD LED TO SATURDAY'S

UNPRECEDENTED EDITORIAL (REFTEL). HOWEVER, THE TWO COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTS REVEAL DISCUSSION OF A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS AND OVERALL MILDNESS OF LEE'S COMMENTS ON SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. IN PARTICULAR, HIS VIEWS ON POTENTIAL REDUCTION OF U.S. PRESENCE, PARA 6, SHOW CONCERN OVER FUTURE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY ROLE AFTER THE ELECTIONS. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

2. ON SUBVERSION: RICHARDSON INTERVIEW BEGAN WITH LEE'S "HYPOTHETICAL ANSWER TO A HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION", TO EFFECT THAT COMMUNIST

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PARTY WOULD BE PERMITTED TO OPERATE IN SINGAPORE IF IT GENUINELY

DISAPPROVED USE OF FORCE. MOVING DIRECTLY TO SUBVERSION, LEE AGREED THAT AUSTRALIA REMAINS A SEEDBED FOR SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF BUDDING SINGAPOREAN AND MALAYSIAN COMMUNISTS. "BUT I DOUBT IF THEY WILL MAKE THE HARDCORE... THEY WILL BE USEFUL ADJUNCTS IN SOFTENING UP WESTERN OPINION... YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE ODD (PERSON... DOESN'T SLIP INTO SENSITIVE POSITIVE."

3. ON SINGAPORE FUTURE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN A RESPONSE TO A CONTENTIOUS QUESTION CONCERNING OPPOSITION PARTIES, LEE DELIVERED A TREATISE ON THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN SINGAPORE ASSERTING THAT LEADERS OF OPPOSITION PARTIES "ARE NOT MEN OF SERIOUS INTENT", HE ALSO MOURNED THE DISINCLINATION OF "ABLE MEN OF HIGH INTEGRITY AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE" TO JOIN THE SECOND GENERATION OF PAP LEADERSHIP.

4. ON THE DOMESTIC SOCIAL SIDE, LEE DESCRIBED THE DECLINE OF FAMILY VALUES DUE TO THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN. HE DENIED LINKAGES BETWEEN RECESSION AND RACIAL TENSION, ASKING RHETORICALLY "DO PEOPLE REALLY BELIEVE IN AN UNEMPLOYMENT SITUATION THAT A PERSON IS UNEMPLOYED BECAUSE OF HIS RACE."

5. ON POWER BALANCE IN SEA: LEE CONTENDED THAT CHINA WOULD CONTINUE TO STRESS STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS AS LONG AS THERE WERE PERCEIVED DANGERS OF SOVIET REPLACEMENT OF U.S. PRESENCE IN ASEAN. HE CONTINUED THAT AS LONG AS AMERICAN NAVAL PRESENCE MATCHES THAT OF SOVIETS IN SIZE AND QUALITY, THE SOVIET INDIAN OCEAN PRESENCE WOULD NOT GIVE HIM CAUSE FOR CONCERN; HOWEVER, PRO-SOVIET IMBALANCE "COULD MAKE THINGS A LITTLE MORE UNCOMFORTABLE". HE ALSO UNDERLINED THAT WEST WAS INCAPABLE OF COUNTERING THIRD COUNTRY GUERRILLA WARES DUE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND STRESSED SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN DEFENSE MATTERS.

6. ON U.S. REGIONAL ROLE: IN THE SHORT TERM, HE CONSIDERS IT POSSIBLE FOR A FURTHER DIMINUTION OF U.S. INTEREST IN SEA, BUT HE STRESSED THE MIDDLE TERM RANGE FOR JUDGING U.S. COMMITMENT. IF A SIGNIFICANT U.S. REDUCTION PERSISTS EVEN AFTER SHORT RUN EMOTIONALISM SUBSIDED, THEN IT WOULD BE TIME FOR A PROFOUND REASSESSMENT BY THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION.

(COMMENT: LEE APPARENTLY IS WARY OF POTENTIAL CARTER FOREIGN
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POLICY BUT IS WILLING TO WITHHOLD JUDGMENT UNTIL AFTER CONCRETE MOVES ARE MADE.)

7. ON ASEAN-AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS: LEE DELIVERED AN EXPOSITION ON AUSTRALIAN TARIFF POLICY AND THE LONG-RANGE NEED TO LOWER THE BARRIERS. "YOUR INDUSTRIES CAN STAND THE INFLUX OF SIMPLE MANUFACTURING FROM THE ASEAN COUNTRIES". HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS NOT A MATTER DEMANDING IMMEDIATE DISCUSSION. COMMENT:

AN AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMAT POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS AN ASTUTE EDUCATIONAL ATTEMPT BY LEE TO REACH AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC ON TOPIC THAT APPEARS TO BE SOURCE OF SIGNIFICANT FUTURE CONTENTION BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND ASEAN.

8. BEST QUOTE (AFTER BEING ASKED IF HE COULD GET ALONG WITH FRASER AT LEAST AS WELL AS HE GOT ALONG WITH WHITLAM): "WELL MY JOB IS TO GET ALONG WITH ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY WHO HAS BUSINESS TO TRANSACT WITH ME. AND IF I ALSO LIKE THE PERSON I AM DEALING WITH, WELL THAT IS A BONUS."
HOLDRIDGE

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